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Neocolonialism, Liberation Theology and the Nicaraguan Revolution

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DWC 202

24 April 2015

This paper will attempt to answer an important question regarding the study of revolutions in developing countries: how does Liberation Theology address the problems of neocolonialism that plagues the Latin American continent? The analysis will use the Central American nation, Nicaragua, and its Sandinista revolution as a country case. This question is important to the study because it helps to understand the extent or the kind of an impact religion has on revolutions. In Latin America, the population is majority Roman Catholic. Due to this, the hierarchy of the Church and the laity has had a certain influence on the political and economic development of Latin American states. Specifically, the paper will focus on how Liberation Theology addresses the problem of neocolonialism in the developing world. Neocolonialism is the process by which Western governments, institutions and multinational corporations use their economic and political power to continue the exploitation of non- European populations in developing countries. Dependency theory will be utilized in order to understand the relationship between dominant and dependent countries. By having a knowledge of Dependency theory, one can understand the causes of the Nicaraguan Revolution. During the time of the Somoza dictatorship, Nicaragua relied on multinational corporations and funding from the United States government. The exploitive relationship between the United States and Latin America can be better understood within the context of neocolonialism. Liberation Theology critiques this exploitive relationship in a theological context. The end goal of this theological thought is to liberate poor individuals from the systematic forces that keep them in poverty. The example of the Nicaraguan revolution illustrates that Liberation Theology was successful in overcoming the effects of neocolonialism.

*Neocolonialism in Latin America*

The Latin American continent was dominated by Spanish and Portuguese empires since 1492. Gradually during the nineteenth century, the countries of Latin America gained their independence from their former colonizers. Though these new states gained their ability to govern their destiny, they were certainly not independent from the influences of the West. There was no formal control over the affairs of Latin American countries but there was informal control economically and diplomatically. This informal control exemplifies neocolonialism. Even though the United States has never colonized Latin America, it held a certain close relationship with the continent since President James Monroe sent a message to Congress in 1823 outlining the relationship. This message, which is now known as the Monroe Doctrine, asserted that the United States has the right to become involved in the affairs of American states if European powers attempted to colonize or threaten the independence of a Latin American country.<sup>1</sup> Since this message was given, presidents interpreted this doctrine to justify their involvement in the affairs of Latin American countries for the interests of the United States.

One of the ways neocolonialism was expressed was through international trade between the West and Latin America. These economic transactions are the basis of dependency theory. This theory is one way to describe the neocolonial relationship between the developed and developing world. The school of thought describes developed, rich countries as ‘the center’ and developing, poor countries as ‘peripheries’ that are outside the capitalist world.<sup>2</sup> In this center-periphery relationship one finds that peripheries serve as an instrument for the center to transfer capital and economic surplus to the developed country. As a result of the West integrating Latin American countries to the capitalist system, there is growing underdevelopment. This

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<sup>1</sup> James Monroe, “Message to Congress,” in *Problems in Modern Latin American History a Reader*, ed. John Charles Chasteen and Joseph Tulchin. (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1994), 298-299.

<sup>2</sup> Andre Gunder Frank, “The Development of Underdevelopment,”():18

underdevelopment negatively affects the “economic, political and social life” of Latin America.<sup>3</sup> If the developed world wants to have strong development, the theory argues that the ties between the center and the peripheries should be weakened.<sup>4</sup> Underdevelopment can be seen as a form of domination exerted by the developed countries, through neocolonialism, in order to serve their economic interests. Through trade, Western countries act as imperialists by manipulating the capitalist system to satisfy their needs. This exasperated poverty and inequality in the underdeveloped world.<sup>5</sup>

For the 1800s and 1900s, the Latin American economy was dominated by the agricultural industry. The continent produced and exported many primary products that included sugar, coffee, cotton, grain, bananas, tobacco and other goods. These agricultural products are defined by their lower prices. The integration of agrarian capitalism resulted in a large, impoverished rural population. In addition, the traditional lives of the rural population were being devastated by the demands of the global economy.<sup>6</sup> Between 1880- 1930, ninety percent of the wealth accrued by companies that settled in Latin American countries came from exports to American and European markets.<sup>7</sup> The ever increasing returns from expanding export markets only benefited the land owners while the rural, poor majority continued to suffer. This was further exasperated as the neocolonial forces empowered the landowners to remove the peasants from their land and make them the landowners’ employees.<sup>8</sup> One of the consequences of the increasing power of production owners was the emergence of multinational corporations that had monopolies on certain markets. An example includes the United Fruit Company which had a

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<sup>3</sup> Frank, “Underdevelopment,” 20.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>5</sup> Angotti, “Dependency Theory,” 127.

<sup>6</sup> John Charles Chasteen, *Born in Blood and Fire* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2001), 179.

<sup>7</sup> Chasteen, *Born*, 180.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 183-183.

monopoly on bananas. Its power allowed it to have economic influence over their host governments which made it possible to manipulate the labor and land to maximize their profits. The power exerted by multinational corporations exemplifies underdevelopment. Latin American countries became dependent on the trade between it and the West. Though there was an increase in wealth in the developing countries, it was only concentrated in the hands of a few which hindered development. In the case of Latin America, inequality grew and the rural poor became mere tools for the capitalist system. Due to the stagnation of traditional agriculture and foreign trade, countries became entirely dependent “on their foreign economic relations”.<sup>9</sup> The neocolonial order created a system that trapped Latin America. The economic interests of the West were fulfilled through the exploitation of the rural poor.

A second way neocolonialism was expressed was through the diplomatic power of the West. This was especially true for the United States since it shares relative proximity with Latin America. In addition, there was the lingering influence of the Monroe Doctrine. One way the United States exerted control in Latin American affairs was through the Organization of American States (OAS). The purpose of this organization is to promote economic cooperation, democracy and non- intervention. However, it was used for “U.S. diplomatic supremacy in the hemisphere, in addition to its economic and military supremacy.”<sup>10</sup> In addition, the 1950 Mutual Security Act allowed the U.S. military to advise, train, and arm forces in the continent.<sup>11</sup> During the 1960s, President Kennedy started the Alliance for Progress which was the Marshall Plan for Latin America whose purpose was to stimulate economic development and support political

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<sup>9</sup> Osvaldo Sunkel, “National Development Policies and External Dependence In Latin America,” in *Problems in Modern Latin American History a Reader*, ed. John Charles Chasten and Joseph Tulchin Chicago: (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1994), 334.

<sup>10</sup> Mary B. Vanderlaan, *Revolution and Foreign Policy in Nicaragua*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1986) 10.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

reform in order to stop the spread of communism.<sup>12</sup> These acts of militaristic imperialism occurred during the Cold War at a time when the United States was combatting the threat of communism. The United States fought to ensure communism did not settle in a country near its border. The actions of the United States were justified through the Monroe Doctrine. In the process of protecting American strategic interests “Latin America [was] prevented from choosing their form of government and did not even control their own destinies”.<sup>13</sup> The countries of the southern continent lost their sovereignty and become puppets to serve American military interests. In this way, the neocolonial order continued to exploit Latin America. The economic relationship of neocolonialism caused poverty and inequality and the governments had no ability to alter these patterns of subsistence because it would threaten US strategic interests and deemed communist. The dictators in Latin America were puppets of the United States. This institutionalized neocolonialism allowed the multinational corporations to set up operations, exploit workers and bribe dictators with monetary and military aid from the US in order to suppress resistance and opposition. Through neocolonialism, the rich few stood to benefit and the poor majority suffered. However, religion became critical in addressing this problem.

### *The Emergence of Liberation Theology*

Latin America is a majority Roman Catholic continent after the religion was introduced by the Spanish and Portuguese colonizers. In the 1960s, a new form of theological thought emerged called Liberation Theology which addressed the systematic problems of poverty and inequality that was suffered by the majority of Latin America’s population. The founding father of Liberation Theology, Fr. Gustavo Gutierrez, is a Peruvian priest who published *A Theology of Liberation* which outlines a theological critique of neocolonialism. Prior to publishing, there

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<sup>12</sup>Chasteen, *Born*, 277.

<sup>13</sup>Alonso Aguilar, “Pan- Americanism” in *Problems in Modern Latin American History a Reader*, ed. John Charles Chasten and Joseph Tulchin Chicago: (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1994), 334.

were certain developments in the Catholic Church that allowed it to emerge. At the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council in 1962, Pope John XXIII called for a “more socially conscious doctrine” that gave more pastoral responsibility for lay people in the church.<sup>14</sup> Then, in 1968, the tenets of Vatican II were applied in Latin America. This was done in Medellin, Colombia where the Latin American Bishops’ Conference (CELAM) interpreted the documents of Vatican II “in light of the dependent reality of the continent”.<sup>15</sup> Due to the reality of Latin America, the bishops at the conference called for a transformation of society. They denounced the many forms of Western development and called upon true development for Latin America through the transition of more human conditions. In addition, the Medellin document spoke of the formation of Christian base communities which were lay- led groups of Christians who would interpret the Bible in light of the suffering faced by the poor in Latin America.<sup>16</sup> It was these factors that influenced Gutierrez to publish his revolutionary book.

Gutierrez defines his book as “an attempt at reflection, based on the Gospel and the experiences of men and women committed to the process of liberation, in the oppressed and exploited land of Latin America”.<sup>17</sup> The book is not a political text or a manifesto. It is a theological text that combines interpretations of traditional and contemporary sources in order to understand the state of oppression in Latin America. This process of liberation is considered a *praxis*, which is a convergence between reflection and action.<sup>18</sup> Thinking and reflection is considered crucial for Liberation Theology. In this context one has to reflect on why people are poor and why they stay poor. In addition, a liberation theologian has to reflect on what God’s

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<sup>14</sup> Margaret Randall, *Christians in the Nicaraguan Revolution* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1983) 19.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Philip Berryman, *Liberation Theology* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987) 23.

<sup>17</sup> Fr. Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, trans. Sr. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973) ix.

<sup>18</sup> Gutierrez, *Liberation*, 7.



plan is for the poor and for humanity in order to address the systemic problems. Most theology stops at reflection. What makes Liberation Theology unique is that the next step is to take action. In light of the problems faced by the oppressed and God's call for humanity, one can take a course of action.<sup>19</sup> By doing this, one can live a "Christian life centered around a concrete and creative commitment of service to others".<sup>20</sup> The process will allow humanity to truly address the systemic problem of oppression.

The end goal of liberation theology "is to see man in search of a qualitatively different society in which he will be free from all servitude, in which he will be the artisan of his own destiny".<sup>21</sup> The servitude Gutierrez alludes to is neocolonialism. As a man who is committed to his faith, Gutierrez sees the Latin American people suffering from poverty. Prior to the emergence of Liberation Theology, it was commonly held among Catholics that social and economic anguish was ordained by God himself.<sup>22</sup> However, Gutierrez recognized that the people were being oppressed by the manipulation of the West who impeded the development of Latin America. "The rise of multinational businesses and their growing control of the economy of Latin America...were responsible for the loss of political leadership".<sup>23</sup> The U.S. - installed dictators lacked the ability to govern since they stood to serve foreign economic interests instead of the interests of the citizens. In the process of 'development', Gutierrez employs dependency theory and describes the continent in terms of underdevelopment. The dynamics of underdevelopment has created a world of "greater wealth for the few and greater poverty for the

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<sup>19</sup> Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986) 24.

<sup>20</sup> Gutierrez, *Liberation*, 11.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 91

<sup>22</sup> Dana Sawchukl, "The Catholic Church in the Nicaraguan Revolution: A Gramscian Analysis," *Sociology of Religion* 58 (1997): 44

<sup>23</sup> Gutierrez, *Liberation*, 88

many”.<sup>24</sup> The growth of world markets has coincided with the growth of dependence and domination among nations.<sup>25</sup> During this time the poor keep falling behind and the gap between rich and poor countries to expand.<sup>26</sup> Through Christian analysis, Gutierrez uses faith to address these critical issues facing the poor and oppressed who are the victims of the exploitive relationship between Latin America and the West.

The root cause of these problems that burden the poor is sin. Since sin is the rejection of love, it is “the ultimate cause of poverty, injustice and the oppression in which men live”. The source of the unjust system that degrades the poor is rooted in man’s “willingness to reject God and neighbor”.<sup>27</sup> So to empower those who are oppressed, there needs to be a liberation from the system that is rooted in evil. In solidarity, the oppressed must guide their own destiny to liberate themselves in light of the Christian principles to be free from sin. For Liberation Theology, there needs to be a “liberation from the domination exercised by the great capitalist countries, and especially by the most powerful, the United States of America”.<sup>28</sup> In this process there needs to be a continuous social revolution that “will radically and qualitatively change the conditions in which they live now”.<sup>29</sup> It is a revolution that needs to envelope the whole continent to ensure a successful liberation from the forces of neocolonialism. Through this revolution, Gutierrez envisions a continent that abolishes “the present status quo”, replaces it with a “just society based on new relationships of production”, and ends the culture of domination by countries, social classes and individuals.<sup>30</sup> This can be achieved by responding to God’s call for a humane society. By responding to God’s call, Latin Americans can take control of their destinies to achieve what

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 85.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 86

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 88

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 48.

Gutierrez believes is the end goal. “The goal is not only better living conditions, a radical change of structures, a social revolution; it is much more: the continuous creation, never ending, of a new way to be a man.”<sup>31</sup> The poor need to be liberated from the social structures rooted in sin that cause poverty and inequality. There needs to be a direction that allows them to be outside of the capitalist system. By doing this there can be a new affirmation of humanity that is not controlled by neocolonial forces that cause destitution and suffering.

Gutierrez notes, the Church, especially in Latin America, was previously characterized as being an institution of the elites. Instead of acting for the preferential treatment of the poor, the Church aligned itself with the people who perpetrated oppression. It defended the social structures and individuals that has keep the world’s majority in poverty. But Gutierrez recognizes, with the advent of Vatican II, a new era for the Church that understands the reality of the social situation facing Latin America.<sup>32</sup> At the time of writing his book, he believes that the Church at all levels is coming to learn and understand the structural problems that are plaguing the world’s poor.<sup>33</sup> The Church needs to separate itself from those who wield power in order to have the ability to speak out against the system that causes injustice.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, the Church needs to become “a poor Church” so it can fundamentally know the suffering of the poor which will allow the Church to effectively work to liberate those in poverty through solidarity.<sup>35</sup> This is done at all levels. The bishops have the ability to denounce different forms of injustice because of his position within the institutional Church. For the clergy, they have the ability to live and suffer with the poor and know the liberating message that comes from biblical texts.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 108.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 101

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 115.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 117.

Then a crucial aspect is the role of the laity in the process of liberation.<sup>36</sup> As the ones who are the sufferers of the neocolonial order, it is up to them to guide the liberation. This echoes the message of Vatican II that called for a greater participation of the laity. In Latin America, Christian base communities are important in driving the revolution. With greater emphasis on laity, Liberation Theology is easily applicable. It empowers individual Christians to govern their own destiny to escape from the forces of exploitation. This new empowerment is critical in understanding role of religion in a revolution.

### *The Sandinistan Revolution*

The revolution in Nicaragua, notably referred to as the Sandinista Revolution, took place between 1961, when the Sandinistan National Liberation Front (FSLN) was founded, and July 19, 1979, when the Somoza fled Nicaragua and the FSLN took power. The revolution occurred as a direct response of continued foreign intervention in Nicaraguan affairs by the United States government. During the 1900s, prior to the revolution, the United States monetarily and militaristically supported the Somoza dictatorship. At one point between 1912 and 1933 the United States maintained troops in the country.<sup>37</sup> One man named August Cesar Sandino organized an army and revolted in the hope of driving out American forces in Nicaragua. In 1933 when the forces did leave, Anastasia Somoza Garcia rose to power as a US-installed dictator. Out of fear of Sandino and his followers threatening his power, Somoza had Sandino executed with his U.S. - equipped National Guard.<sup>38</sup> This made Sandino a martyr for the Nicaraguan struggle and the FSLN named the group after him.

Even when the United States pulled their forces from Nicaragua, the United States still had a strong influence on the country's affairs. The U.S. government was able to do this through

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 102-106

<sup>37</sup> Gary E. McCuen, *The Nicaraguan Revolution*, (Hudson, WI: Gary E. McCuen Publications, 1986), 8.

<sup>38</sup> McCuen, *Revolution*, 9-11.

the installed dictatorship of the Somoza dynasty who acted as a puppet for American interests. Anastasio Somoza was quoted as saying, "I stood back to back with the US and gave my friend and ally all the support I could muster... No president anywhere supported the policies of the United States more devoutly than I did".<sup>39</sup> By allowing the United States to interfere with Nicaraguan affairs, Somoza relinquished the country's sovereignty in order to increase his wealth and serve the interests of the American government and its businesses. Under the Somoza dictatorship, poverty and inequality were exasperated. During the mid- 1970s, the Somozas amassed one quarter of the total assets in Nicaragua.<sup>40</sup> By 1979, the family had a fortune of \$400-500 million.<sup>41</sup> In addition, there was an inequitable distribution of land in which half of the land was owned by less than two percent of the population and the poorest fifty percent only owned four percent.<sup>42</sup> This was due in part by Somoza's strong relationship with the United States and its multinational corporations. At this time, Nicaragua became dependent on foreign trade by largely exporting coffee.<sup>43</sup> As wealth grew for the elites in the society, the majority remained poor, illiterate and unhealthy. By keeping the population poor, illiterate and unhealthy American imperialists were able to maintain their interests. The Somoza dictatorship was able to subjugate his people and keep them economically powerless so the population could not threaten the foreign interests that supported his regime.<sup>44</sup> An economically poor population with a strong dictator allowed American corporations to manipulate their profits. In addition, a poor population allowed the American government to maintain a strong position in Latin America during the Cold War.

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<sup>39</sup> Vanderlaan, *Revolution*, 24.

<sup>40</sup> McCuen, *Revolution*, 12.

<sup>41</sup> Tomas Borge et al., "Introduction," in *Sandinistas Speak*, (NY: Pathfinder Press, 1982), 8.

<sup>42</sup> Tomas Borge et al., "Introduction," *Sandinistas*, 9.

<sup>43</sup> McCuen, *Revolution*, 8.

<sup>44</sup> Jaime Wheelock, "Nicaragua's Economy and Imperialism" in *Sandinistas Speak*, (NY: Pathfinder Press, 1982), 118.

When the FSLN organized, it had enormous support from the peasants and working class who were suffering and majority Catholic. In addition the bourgeois of Nicaragua began to oppose the Somoza revolution since the dictatorship's policies were leading to their own marginalization.<sup>45</sup> Due to the government's disregard for the majority, Catholic poor, the bishops decided to support the FSLN.<sup>46</sup> With this broad support, the FSLN was able to gain power in 1979 and implement policy in light of the continued economic and militaristic exploitation of the United States.

### *Christians in the Revolution*

In order to fully understand the reasoning behind the economic policies of the Sandinistan government in relation to Liberation Theology, one must know the full impact Christianity had on the revolution. It is important to note that the FSLN was not a Christian revolution in itself. The Sandinistas allowed the practice of any religious faith.<sup>47</sup> However, "Christian patriots and revolutionaries [were] an integral part of the Sandinista people's revolution" who struggled in hopes of "building the new society".<sup>48</sup> This is critical in Liberation Theology which had the goal of uniting Christians in an effort to create a society that removes injustice. The desire to achieve this goal drove Christians in Nicaragua to revolt against the Somoza dictatorship which became a tool of oppression. To join the Sandinista revolution was a religious call on part of members of Christian base communities. This can be exemplified through the words of one community, named *Solentiname*, whose members reflected on the Nicaraguan revolution in light of Liberation Theology. One member writes, "Christ was a

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<sup>45</sup> Sawchukl, "A Gramscian Analysis," 42.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>47</sup> Tomas Borge et al., "The Historic Program of the FSLN," in *Sandinistas Speak*, trans. Will Reissner, (NY: Pathfinder Press, 1982), 20.

<sup>48</sup> "The Role of Religion in the New Nicaragua," in *Sandinistas Speak*, trans. Intercontinental Press, (NY: Pathfinder Press, 1982), 105-107.

guerrilla fighter, not the sort of person to be kicked around, with the imperialist boot always on top of him”.<sup>49</sup> Another member said, “revolution and religion go together; they are two equal things, never unequal... For me, there are no Christians who are not revolutionaries”.<sup>50</sup> These were the beliefs of the Christians who wanted to liberate themselves from their state of deprivation. Through Liberation Theology, the Nicaraguan people understood that it was an obligation for them, as Christians, to join the revolution and live a revolutionary life similar to that of Christ in the Gospels. The revolution was a vocation that Christians, both laity and religious, had to commit to. Their way of understanding Christ saw the struggle as a way to live a life that Jesus called them to live. As Christians joined the revolution, the force of religion and the tenets of Liberation Theology were integrated in the Sandinistan revolution.

As one can see, Liberation Theology share similarities with Marxism. However, truly Marxist societies did not form in Latin America. Instead, Liberation Theology was employed within the context of socialism in achieving its goals of lifting the poor out of poverty.<sup>51</sup> For the Sandinistas, government officials developed what they believed was a ‘mixed economy’ in order to maintain an economy in light of the plight of the poor. So the Sandinistas put forward the Plan for Economic Reactivation in order to reverse the problems of “backwardness, underdevelopment [and] poverty”.<sup>52</sup> This economic plan gained Nicaraguan independence from “neocolonialism, capitalism, and imperialism’s oligarchic enterprises”. The economic development strategy upheld private property for traditional businesses, state enterprise through the dispossession of Somoza property, peasant and artisan employment and a cooperative

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<sup>49</sup> Randall, *Christians*, 69.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 112.

<sup>51</sup> Jose Larrea Gayarre, “The Challenges of Liberation Theology to Neoliberal Economic Policies,” *Social Justice* 21 (1994): 42.

<sup>52</sup> Jaime Wheelock. “Nicaragua’s Economy and Imperialism,” in *Sandinistas Speak*, trans. Intercontinental Press, (NY: Pathfinder Press, 1982), 116- 117.

production sector.<sup>53</sup> In addition there was land reform, programs to improve healthcare and literacy rates, labor organization and agriculture diversification.<sup>54</sup> These developments followed two principles. The first principle was to create an economy that limited the effects of external market forces. Through a more self- sustaining, diversified economy, Nicaragua would not be dependent on the fluctuations of imported products and the country would be able to export into the international market.<sup>55</sup> The second principle was to implement policy according to the “logic of the majority”. This meant that economic development programs were aimed at lifting the poor majority out of poverty. The programs provided skills, opportunities and resources that allowed citizens to have a chance to increase their standard of living and not be tools of the capitalist system.<sup>56</sup> Due to the actions of the Sandinistas, inflation, unemployment, illiteracy and infant mortality significantly decreased.<sup>57</sup> These programs not only lift people out of poverty but reduced the rate of inequality by having a more equitable distribution of resources. In this way, the FSLN created a new Nicaraguan society “where men do not live off the exploitation of other men”.<sup>58</sup>

Through the Nicaraguan Revolution, the principles of Liberation Theology were realized. In solidarity, the poor, oppressed people of Nicaragua united to overthrow a dictator who abused his power in order to increase his wealth which marginalized the majority of the population. These actions allowed Christians to liberate themselves from the global, capitalist system which caused their demise. The Nicaraguan people followed the call to liberate themselves from oppression which was an end result of neocolonialism. The FSLN was the ultimate organization

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<sup>53</sup> Vanderlaan, *Revolution*, 66.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 67.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 69.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 97.

<sup>57</sup> McCuen, *Revolution*, 23.

<sup>58</sup> Tomas Borge. “The Second Anniversary,” in *Sandinistas Speak*, trans. Intercontinental Press, (NY: Pathfinder Press, 1982), 133.



who provided the vision and leadership to revolt against the economic structure that caused dependence and underdevelopment. Once the Sandinistas removed Somoza from power, their policies further fulfilled the call of Liberation Theology. The FLSN removed themselves from the tendencies of the neocolonial order and afforded the poor the freedom to live a life with a certain level of human dignity.

In answering the question of how Liberation Theology addresses the problems of neocolonialism in Latin America one finds insight on how religion has a strong influence on revolutions. In the case of Nicaragua, religion is important in two distinct ways. For one, religion was important in motivating people to join the revolution. Liberation Theology allowed people to understand their faith in a way that called upon them to fight against the system that oppresses them. Christian base communities motivated members to join the FSLN and act like Christ since he was considered a guerrilla warrior in the biblical passages. A new understanding of faith caused people to believe that to be a true Christian one must be a revolutionary. This gave the FSLN legitimacy and strength in overthrowing the Somoza dictatorship. Secondly, religion influenced the policy of the Sandinistas. The adherents of Liberation Theology who supported the FSLN believed that the government needed to empower the poor and end dependency with the United States. The years following the overthrow, the FSLN implemented these policies. In these ways the religious tenets of Liberation Theology were successful in overcoming neocolonialism.

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